



# NEWS RELEASE

## EUROPE REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND

### PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

CMR 442 APO AE 09042  
U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL – NACHRICHTEN KASERNE  
POSTFACH 103180 69021 HEIDELBERG, GERMANY  
DSN 371-3317/3049 TEL. 06221-17-3317/3049  
JERI CHAPPELLE CELL – 0162-270-0456

---

February 28, 2006

### *Avian Flu presents little risk to most Soldiers, families*

**HEIDELBERG, Germany** – The avian flu virus in its current form presents few risks to most Soldiers and their families living and working in Europe according to the Army’s leading preventive medicine experts in the region.

“As long as the virus remains in its current state, which is a virus passed from one bird to another, our beneficiaries have little if nothing to fear from it,” said Dr. (Lt. Col.) William P. Corr, chief of preventive medicine at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. Corr, an epidemiologist, is also the Europe Regional Medical Command’s Preventive Medicine Consultant, or lead doctor in his field.

According to national and international health organizations, most of the human deaths resulting from avian flu exposure appear in people who keep backyard flocks of chicken or other poultry. The people who get the disease usually have prolonged contact with flocks of birds in unregulated conditions. The disease does not transmit to humans in properly cooked poultry products, as heat kills the bacteria.

“Just because the avian flu virus hasn’t shown up in other than rare cases in humans, it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t continue to take normal precautions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, especially since we’re still in the heart of the regular flu season,” Corr said. Those precautions, Corr said, include:

- Washing your hands before eating or touching eyes, mouth or nose
- Covering the mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing.
- Avoiding prolonged close contact with others (more than four hours in a confined setting lacking proper ventilation).
- Avoiding tobacco use because using tobacco use introduces infectious germs into the body by means of the hand-to-mouth route.

In addition to the normal flu symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches, individuals exposed to infected birds may develop an eye infection or have difficulty breathing. Individuals with these additional symptoms should seek medical care as soon as possible.

The avian flu virus spreads through secretions and excretions of infected birds. The easiest way to keep from getting avian flu is not to handle sick or dead birds of any kind.

Meanwhile, Army experts continue to monitor the international situation and give guidance to unit and garrison commanders on developments.

“At present, H5N1 avian influenza remains largely a disease of birds,” according to a February 2006 fact sheet prepared by the World Health Organization. “The species barrier is significant: the virus does not easily cross from birds to infect humans. Despite the infection of tens of millions of poultry over large geographical areas since mid-2003, fewer than 200 human cases have been laboratory confirmed.”

The avian flu has caused the deaths of migratory birds in Western Europe and one commercial poultry farm in France, but has not become a major health risk to humans in any of the countries hosting U.S. military units or agencies, Corr said.